

Butterfly Conservation Dorset Branch Newsletter No 93



Spring 2020

www.dorsetbutterflies.com



**Butterfly
Conservation**

Saving butterflies, moths and our environment

Editor's Note

I am compiling this newsletter at the mid-point of the first three weeks of lockdown for COVID-19, so unfortunately it is not possible to print and organise its mailing. Therefore for the present (at least), this newsletter will be digital only. In view of the Government's guidelines, we have cancelled all events, and are not producing an Events List.

I want to thank all our contributors to this edition, particularly those who produced their articles after the sunny weather began. I hope you enjoy reading them all.

Jane Smith, Newsletter Editor

CONTENTS

View from the Chair	3
News from the Reserves	6
Raising funds	9
Butterfly Photography Part 3.....	13
Painted Lady Invasion of 2019	17
A Long-tailed Blue Summer	22
Weymouth Relief Road	25
Tony Copper	27
Large Tortoiseshell in Portland	28
Butterfly Summer	31
John Tubb	33
Dorset Branch Who's Who	35

Front cover: Adonis Blue, possibly an aberration called semiceronua. Photo: Shona Refoy

View from the Chair

From Nigel Spring, Dorset Branch Chair

We used to be told that our world was getting smaller – a reflection of how easy it had become to pop over to Berlin for the weekend, travel to southern Spain for the summer break or even commit six months of a gap year to travelling round the countries of the far east from Vietnam to New Zealand. Whether it was a good thing or not is debatable, but the planet certainly seemed to be shrinking for many of us - right up until last December.

And how things have changed since! Now the world is definitely smaller for everyone – to the extent that we are confined for the foreseeable future to our homes and gardens and possibly (at the time of writing) to areas nearby within ‘short exercise’ range. Sadly, visiting nature reserves, conservation volunteering and even Butterfly Transect walking are now considered to be non-essential activities and are forbidden. The Butterfly Transect surveys on some sites have been collecting data every year since 1980, the only serious disruption being caused by the Foot and Mouth outbreak in 2001, and another gap in the data will further undermine the scheme’s usefulness.

Let’s look on the bright side if we can: there will be many positive side-effects of the Coronavirus pandemic – the shrinking clouds of air pollutants over much of the planet, the reduced disturbance of nesting birds by dogs and walkers in many of our national parks, the quiet skies with no vapour trails, and many more.

However, for a lot of people, nature and the outdoors are vitally important for their mental and physical wellbeing and I suspect this enforced imprisonment could have many dire consequences. It

could also require a huge concerted effort afterwards to rebuild our volunteer teams.

Nevertheless, there are plenty of ways in which we can continue to make a useful contribution to the knowledge of our butterflies and moths even within the confines of our highly restricted world. You might not be able to carry out your usual transect walk, but if you haven't already joined up, you could start to collect your garden butterfly records and send them in to Adrian Neil on the garden recording form available on the website, under Recording - Become a recorder, or contact Adrian Neil (see inside back cover) to email you a form. Alternatively you can record them via www.gardenbutterflysurvey.org.

If you are able to leave the garden to 'take exercise', this could take you on foot through one or more Ordnance Survey kilometre squares near your home. Send your butterfly records in to the Dorset Branch website - use the green "Record a sighting" button on the home page - from where they will be added to the new 2020-2024 Dorset Butterfly Atlas. The more squares you can extend your light exercise into the better! It can often be very surprising what can be found in odd corners near home. If you would like to compare your results with previous years, either Robin George or Bill Shreeves (contact details on the inside back cover of this newsletter) will be pleased to tell you what has been seen previously or indeed how often your km square(s) have been visited in the past. You just need to send them your grid references, and if you need help with this, it is on our website under Recording - Become a recorder - How to use grid references (in right-hand column).

And why stop at butterflies! Bumblebees are fascinating creatures and need all the help they can get! There are some very easy to use identification notes produced by Bumblebee Conservation Trust and available online at www.bumblebeeconservation.org/identification-tips. When you have started on Bumblebees, you could progress to the solitary bees – have a look at the information on the Bees,

Wasps and Ants Recording Scheme (BWARS) website
www.bwars.com/information_sheets.

So now, while taking your short exercise you can look out for not just the Small Tortoiseshells, Brimstones and Long-tailed Blues on your patch (one can but dream!), but the Bumblebees, Hairy-footed Flower Bees and all the mining bees that appear in the spring to enjoy the carpets of Dandelions, Cowslips, Bugle, Bluebells, Ground ivy and the multitude of rich nectar sources that abound at this time of year. These can be recorded via Living Record.

Your world might be much reduced now but it is still your oyster, and it is almost certainly full of pearls!

Nigel Spring



Hairy-footed Flower Bee (female) Photo: Vlad Proklov, Creative Commons

News from our Reserves

Nigel Spring brings us up to date on work carried out on our reserves this winter

A huge amount of management work has been carried out this winter on all four of our 'reserve' sites. This has been achieved through the combined efforts of EuCAN contractors working with some EuCAN volunteer groups, the Dorset Countryside Volunteers (DCV) and a number of our Butterfly Conservation volunteers.

ALNERS GORSE: Large open clearings have been created in the scrub area where the spruces were removed in 2018, by the removal of willows, oaks and some overstood blackthorn – this has radically changed the appearance and feel of this part of the reserve and we are looking forward to seeing the bare patches become colonised by Devilsbit Scabious and other wildflowers. Two large swathes have been recut in the Marsh Fritillary area and one across the open area at the foot of the

track by the removal of willow and bramble scrub; large parts of the regenerating birch and willow and bramble scrub have been removed from the wood. Several more oaks have been ringbarked or removed from the open 'wood-pasture' areas to reduce the oak canopy and allow the light in.

Ponies: The four Alners ponies are now off the reserve, on the fields belonging to our neighbours Jan and Bruce Marriott at Common Farm opposite Alners Gorse. We are extremely grateful to Jan and Bruce for their generous gesture. The pony team will be on this land for several months



Scrub cutting at Alners Gorse
Photo: Nigel Spring

we hope, so that Alners has a chance to produce the same flowery spectacle as last year.

Two of the ponies, Blackberry and Scarface, spent 16 days recently grazing the field in Hazelbury Bryan belonging to the Parish Council. We have been working with HBPC to make the field more flowery, planting wildflower plugs, sowing yellow rattle and cutting and removing the rank grass there. The aim was to reduce the grass growth prior to the growing season, which the two ponies did very successfully. Last summer we cut and removed a very good crop of hay from this field and we hope the pony grazing will prepare the sward for another crop this summer (circumstances permitting!)

LANKHAM BOTTOM: Dan Newman our neighbour on the western side of the reserve has recently re-fenced his boundary and was concerned about our overstood hedge possibly toppling onto his new fenceline. The EuCAN contractors and volunteers cut and laid a long stretch of the hedge and built a 'dead hedge' to protect the regrowth, while at the same



Lankham Bottom western hedge after laying and pegging.

Photo: Nigel Spring

time brushcutting the wide swathe of bramble and thorn down the western side gaining an enormous amount of potential grassland. This dead hedge had to be pegged with hazel poles, some of this having to be repeated (twice!) after the ravages of storms Ciara and Dennis.

Further work was carried out on the roadside hedge along the northern edge of the reserve, removing all the ash branches on the hedgerow stools on the roadside in case they become a danger to traffic as Ash Dieback disease takes hold.

The Dorset Countryside Volunteers' weekend work was very frustratingly shortened to just one day by one of the major storms of the winter (it has to be a major storm to curtail DCV's work!). They made the best of their time, however, and did an

amazing job (as usual) clearing most of the scrub in a block on the steep west-facing slope below the A37. The vegetation on these steep slopes, being on thin soils, seems to return to good chalk grassland more readily than areas cleared at the tops of the slopes or on the level ground at the bottom.

PORTLAND SITES: Through the recently rejuvenated Portland Conservation Forum which brings together the many parties involved in wildlife conservation on Portland including BC, it has been agreed that the DWT and BC should try to share their volunteer resources by combining workparties where possible. At least two DWT volunteers were due to join the February workparties on Broadcroft Quarry but the terrible weather scuppered these plans.

Broadcroft Quarry: A mammoth effort with EuCAN contractors and EuCAN and BC volunteer groups (26 people one day including a brushcutter team from the Dorset Midweek Volunteers group of EuCAN, 15 the other) enabled us to brushcut and remove a

considerable amount of rank grass, bramble, clematis and other scrub regrowth and to get the reserve in better shape than for many seasons. We hope the butterflies will appreciate it! Perryfields Quarry: We carried out our annual brushcutting session in preparation for the season and at the same time, two volunteers spent the day removing bramble on the area of Bottomcoombe between Tesco and the tramline – the area that is so good for Small Blues, nurtured and regularly monitored by Ken Dolbear. It is going to be extremely frustrating if we are not able to



Small Blue. Photo: Shona Refoy

see the benefits of our winter work this coming summer, but we hope the butterflies, moths and other wildlife will flourish anyway – whether we can see them or count them - or not!

Raising funds for the Branch

Lyn Pullen looks at our future finances

Dorset Branch is quite well off at the moment, largely thanks to recent bequests, plus government grants which cover our conservation work. However, things do not look so rosy if we project the figures forward a few years. HQ have advised us to make our future financial plans based on receiving no government grants after the end of this cycle, as we do not know what the new government will be willing to fund, or able to fund following the vast spending necessitated by the coronavirus pandemic.

Our major areas of expenditure are conservation work, our newsletters, and the website. You can see the full figures for 2018/2019 in newsletter No 91. Our projected expenditure for 2019/20 is £20,925, though we may be able to reduce that a little.

Our major sources of income have been government grants (through Natural England), our

share of members' subscriptions, various donations and recently we have received several bequests.

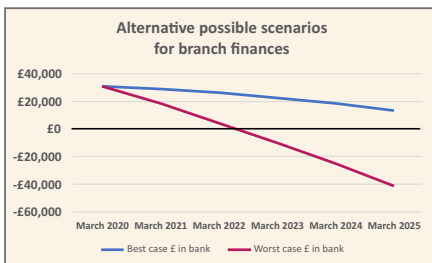
We hope we will receive the government grants, called Countryside Stewardship grants, at their full level for five years, then a reduced amount for the following five years - this reduction is because the Secretary of State for the Environment only promised to maintain the full amount for five years after Brexit. This grant is applied across all the BC reserves in the UK, and if the auditors pick up problems anywhere, all sites are affected by penalties. Add to this the uncertainties caused by Covid-19 and HQ are very sensibly advising us to budget for no government grants, as a worst-case scenario.

Our Treasurer, Georgie Laing, has worked out some basic figures for the next seven years, based on two scenarios: 1) that we continue to receive

government grants (paid in arrears) and 2) that we receive no grants. Both scenarios assume a 5% increase in all other lines, both income and expenditure, including donations, although no large single bequests have been assumed.

In the best case, our Branch funds will run out in 2027; in the worst case (i.e. no grants) it will run out in 2022.

The amount of your annual subscription to Butterfly



Conservation which comes to the Branch is only £6 per membership, an amount which has not increased for some years, even when subscriptions have gone up.

We do not think we can obtain much in the way of grants from grant-making trusts: Dorset only has two big ones, neither of

which are likely to give to us, and our ability to apply to national trusts is limited by HQ wishing to use them for its own funding, especially as this is being hit by the Covid-19 problems. We will, of course, look to cut our expenditure wherever we can, but we are not optimistic about saving large sums.

It is necessary, therefore, that we start to raise income ourselves, and we are appealing to members to help us. The committee will do what they can, but we are already filling other roles.

We know a lot of people are not comfortable with asking others for money, and we certainly won't be expecting you to do a sponsored bungee jump (though if you want to, don't let us stop you!) Money, excluding pure donations, comes from selling goods or services, so think what you could do or sell. Nature is under siege these days, and needs all the help we can give it. We've over 1,000 members now - if you could all come up with only a small amount, it would add up to something really useful.

Ideas of how you could help (some will obviously have to wait until they are possible, given we are locked down):

- Have a **donations box** (which we can provide) in your home and put in your small change.
- **Receive our branch newsletters electronically.**
The newsletter and events list are costing us around £1,000 to print and send out each time.
- **Give Lyn Pullen plants to sell** on her plant stall (if you have some, contact her by email or via the website to organise getting them to Winfrith).
- **Hold a coffee morning** or a “Dine with me” – invite people to come for a coffee or a meal, but make clear that it is in aid of Butterfly Conservation and there will be a collection.
- **Hold a social get-together** where everybody contributes something to eat, and charge entrance or ask for donations. This could be an afternoon tea, a BBQ...
- **Bake some cakes** and sell them.
- **Organise a talk**, say on butterflies, or gardening for butterflies: we've got a Powerpoint presentation for each you can use*. Charge for entrance and sell teas.
- **Open your garden** – we can advertise this as 'members only' if that would be better for you. Offering teas raises even more money.
- **Organise a book sale** – an appeal to your friends or local community is likely to bring in a lot of books (people hate throwing them away). It would be good to check any books donated against www.ziffit.com to see if they could be sold for more than they would get at your

*If you would feel able to give a talk about butterflies, using our slide presentation, or your own pictures, please let us know so we can ask you when we receive a request for a talk. If we can build up a small team of speakers, it would help us cover different dates and areas of the County. You do not need to worry about handling questions: it is perfectly acceptable to say “I don’t know but I’ll find out and get back to you”.

book sale.

- **Hold a quiz** and charge teams to attend.
- **Sell your skills** – do an hour's gardening/ironing/painting....
- **Sell something online** and donate the proceeds. Sites you can use include Ebay.co.uk, Gumtree.com, Ziffit.com.

If you have any other ideas, please contact one of the committee or use the contact form on the website.

If whatever you do needs publicising, please contact Lyn Pullen to put something on the website, Facebook and Twitter. She can also help if you need a poster designed.

Also, please think about leaving us something in your will. Do note that if you want the money to come to the branch, you need to specify this: if you just say £xx to Butterfly Conservation, it will go to the national organisation.



Small Copper. Photo: John Van Crugten.

Getting the money to us:-

- If you have raised money, please donate it electronically if you can, but if you are unable to do so, contact one of us to arrange for us to collect the cash once the lockdown has finished.
- Bank transfers should be made to the HQ account, as separate Branch accounts were closed by HQ on 1 April this year:
Sort code 60-22-45,
Account number 72032332.
Please write "DO" (for "Dorset") where your online bank form allows you to put in a reference, to help Head Office allocate it correctly and also forward details of what you have sent in to Georgie Laing, our treasurer.
- We are currently uncertain about how we will be handling cheques, so please contact Georgie for up to date information; her contact details are at the end of this newsletter, and her postal address is 6, Clarence Road, Weymouth, Dorset DT4 9EE.

Butterfly Photography Part 3

Here Mark Pike writes about his personal perspective on photographing “difficult species”

In this article I am classing “difficult species” as being difficult for me personally, not just to photograph but also for me to get to the chosen site to find them in the first place. I am sure some people have found other species difficult in ways unique to them, or perhaps the ones I have chosen easy?! Anyway, some of my early photographic days were a bit of a challenge, mostly for the fact I often used public transport and/or good old shank’s pony: for some reason a lot of the best places to find butterflies are not convenient to bus stops etc!

Following on from my brief mention of them in the last newsletter, my very first efforts to track down the Elm tree loving White Letter Hairstreak was a good example of a “difficult species” as I knew they were never going to be easy to find or photograph for quite a few reasons. At that time back in the mid 2000’s, I used to regularly



White-letter Hairstreak

keep up with the various sightings around the UK and I had noticed that this species seemed pretty reliable at a location in Woolston, in the Southampton suburbs. Although being slap bang in the middle of a built-up area seemed like a pretty unusual location to find these elusive butterflies, I thought I would give it a go, so I caught an early train to get there in good time. I got off at Woolston station and was not really sure which direction to head at first (online maps on your mobile were in their infancy then!), especially as I could hardly see a tree, let alone an Elm! Luckily some sort of instinct kicked in and I managed to head

in the right direction. I eventually came across a public area with a sort of disused road going through the middle that was lined by a good number of decent sized Elm trees, bingo! This avenue was about a quarter of a mile in length and all I had to do now was peer into the tops of each tree for any activity. After stomping up and down goodness knows how many times and getting some strange looks from the locals I finally found a couple of Hairstreaks flitting around. However, as I was a bit limited due to train times I had to make do with some questionable distant shots as none were coming down low enough for a decent shot, At least I had got something, so not a totally wasted journey. Of course, there is now a good colony of this species at Alners Gorse much closer to home, so I have not been back to Woolston since.

Still on the subject of Hairstreaks, there is one of this species that is just plain difficult, due to the fact that it is only found in a few selected areas in the middle part of the UK and all but inaccessible without your own vehicle. It also has a very



Black Hairstreak

short flight period. The Black Hairstreak is tricky to say the least, but would that put me off?? Not on your life! This required another train journey, this time to Banbury and from there on to Bicester. Once here, the only option was a taxi from the town centre to Whitecross Green Wood situated just about in the middle of nowhere, and the only bus I could find was early morning for the use of school children! Although this was one of the most reliable sites (and still is) to see them you never really know what to expect on a first visit. However, my doubts were soon quashed when I came across a lovely sheltered area and spotted a pristine Hairstreak sitting on a leaf quite literally looking at me at about head height! This was followed by about another half a dozen or so during my three to four hour visit. Fine pictures obtained; job done again!

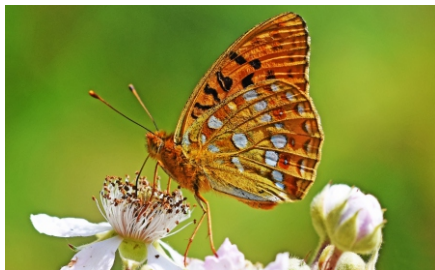
To save myself a trip to the Isle of Wight, another of my early exploits was to track down what was at the time the only semi-established colony of Glanville Fritillaries on the mainland in the Hurst Castle area on the Hampshire coast in 2006. I was living near Poole at the time and the challenge was getting from there to the closest point that was in walking distance. I had worked this out to be a bus stop at Milford on Sea but I soon found out that getting to there was only half the battle! It was relatively easy getting to New Milton station by train and from there a bus to Milford, but it was then I realised I had made a bit of a mistake! I was now faced with an almost two mile walk to Hurst Castle along the shingle beach (similar to Chesil Beach) which was an absolute killer on the feet and



Glanville Fritillary

by the time I reached Hurst Castle it felt more like I had walked 20 miles. It was only after chasing Glanvilles for a few hours that I spotted a small ferry boat and used it to return across to Keyhaven (a regular service). I then used this for a couple of years thereafter! The long laborious hike along the beach was certainly worth it as the Glanvilles were quite abundant in a small area. I believe soon after my last visit to here around 2010/12 this particular colony sadly vanished.

Another fritillary that has posed me with a few challenges is the rare High Brown that can now only be found in just a few small colonies in the North West and South West of the UK. My first effort to find this elusive butterfly also involved a train, this time to Exeter then a bus ride to the southern tip of Dartmoor at Dunsford Wood. This time, luckily for me, the bus stop here was right by the entrance to the wood! At this time back in 2006 I was soon able to locate a few High Browns flying around with



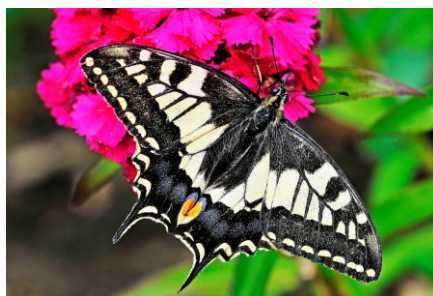
High Brown Fritillary

some of the commoner and very similar Dark Green Fritillaries (which they often do, frustratingly!) and even managed to photograph a mating pair. However, very sadly I re-visited here again in 2009 and astonishingly High Browns had become extinct from the site in that short period, a sign of the times. In more recent times I have seen them on Dartmoor at Aish Tor but they were very difficult to pin down being very strong flyers, especially on a fine day. I remember well my frustrated other half running around like a looney on a very hot day trying to find one that had settled for more than a few seconds!

Of all the trips I have made I suppose the most ambitious was the one to Strumpshaw Fen in the Norfolk Broads to look for the iconic Swallowtail back in 2009. From here in Dorset that

involved a trip by train to London Waterloo, then across to Liverpool Street and on to Norwich. I then picked up a local train to the village of Brundall, as near as I could find to the Fen, where I had managed to book a B&B for the night. Obviously this all took time, not to mention the 30 min or so walk to/from the B&B to the Fen itself, so in effect I had an afternoon and morning to find my subject. Despite a superb warm June evening and basically staying out until it got dark, I did not photograph one Swallowtail, although I did see one in flight. Thank goodness the next morning proved much better and I finally got some decent shots. It was then time for the long but satisfied trek back to Dorset.

All photos by Mark Pike.



Swallowtail

Painted Lady Invasion of 2019

Steve Brown had prepared a talk to give in May, but sadly this will not now happen. Luckily for us, he has adapted it for inclusion in the newsletter

No butterfly has had more press time in the UK and many of us share a fascination with this wonderful butterfly.

Let us look at some Painted Lady facts:

- It is the greatest migrant of the butterfly world – It can travel from the Arctic circle to North Africa in one generation
- It has the largest distribution of any butterfly, in most continents
- It has been recorded flying at 60 mph (with wind assistance of course!) and 15mph without assistance
- It can fly up to 1200 ft above the earth, although generally 400 – 500ft is its usual flight path, occasionally coming down to roost at night.
- 11 million Painted Lady butterflies reached the UK in 2009
- 21 million emigrated in the autumn from the UK into Europe in the same year
- The migratory cycle generally involves six generations, five generations to fly north from Africa, the sixth generation returns to Africa in one ‘hop’
- All these amazing facts and the butterfly is not much more than 0.5g, its brain is about the size of a pin head and it lives only for four weeks.

It was very exciting in February and March 2019 to hear, via Twitter, of hundreds of thousands of butterflies in Cyprus and Central Europe heading north. 2019 could be an invasion year! But when would we be able to see them? Would it match the 1996 for numbers? I needed a way to track them through time.

To track the invasion, I used the map option on the UKBMS website

and filtered the database for Painted Lady and the particular transect week. This was the only data that was available to me at the time, and of course transect walks don't record all the butterflies present. However, I wanted to see the invasion as time goes on, so that it was useful for my project. I used other data streams such as the Big Butterfly Count and Dorset website to add emphasis to the main data. I use just five maps here, but I used all 26 to plot butterfly numbers against week number below.



Week 5: 29 April – 5 May
Number recorded 23



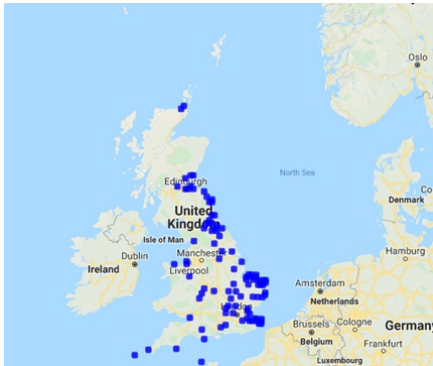
Week 6: 6 May – 12 May
Number recorded 6

Transect weeks – what do they have to tell us in Dorset?

The invasion starts slowly and by the end of April there are around 20 butterflies a week recorded. A week later butterfly numbers had crashed! What had happened? At this time thousands were being recorded in the Netherlands and even on a container ship in the North Sea. Something was sweeping them away. I think the culprit was Storm Hannah which hit Ireland and the UK on the 26th April and swept the butterflies in a huge anticlockwise circle away from the South of England. The wind was measured as 66 mph at the Needles, blowing the butterflies towards the Netherlands and North Sea.

Numbers quickly recovered and in June the highest numbers per week were recorded. You can see from the map they were mainly coming from the east. In the Shetlands (no transect walks) the

butterflies were first recorded in the very northern islands, so they were in fact heading south! Shetland saw 1106 Painted Lady butterflies, when in a normal year they record around 30 (2017). 2578 butterflies in transect week 13 was the highest number for 2019 recorded on our transects walks in Dorset.



Week 11: 10 June – 16 June
Number recorded 287



Week 13: 24 June – 30 June
Number recorded 2,578

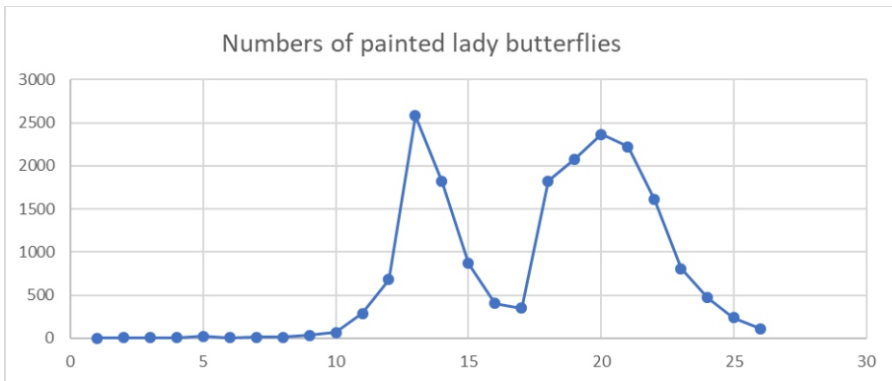
After a decline at the end of June probably due to the death of the first immigrants and the delay until the new generation emerges, the second maximum occurred, this time with many in the south as we would expect.



Week 26: 23 Sep – 29 September
Number recorded 110

Autumn (from the Dorset BC website)

2 October - 34
8 October - 8
19 October - 7
23 October - 5
November - 0
December - 0



The decline in numbers in the Autumn shows the emigration of the butterfly back to its winter quarters in Africa.

Overall, looking back on the year, sadly there were fewer recorded in Dorset than in previous invasions, but the highest numbers ever were recorded in Scandinavia and the Shetland Isles. As you see from the graph there was a long tail with all the butterflies arriving from week 10 to produce the maximum. Then a fall until the next generation emerges to combine with the new immigrants from Europe.

2019 Headlines

- The UK BC transects recorded a total of 18,877 (Dorset 2,392), BC Migrant watch website 3,426
- Dorset 'casual' recording on the website 4,027 (meadow brown 25,391 for comparison) 6th most common
- The Big Butterfly Count produced an incredible 420,841 over all the country during July and August
- 164 Painted Lady butterflies were recorded on St Kilda, way out in the Atlantic Ocean on 3rd August
- The first big arrival, in mid-June, seemed to come from the north east, which is unusual.
- The second peak on the graph above will, in part, represent the offspring of the first influx, but there was also another massive influx at that time. This was not from the south, but from the

- north-east, probably from Scandinavia. Spectacular numbers suddenly appeared on the coast of east Scotland and north-east England in late July/early August.

I hope you have enjoyed this analysis of the Painted Lady data. It shows that we will always be surprised by this little but glorious butterfly. In the next report on the Invasion Year in the Autumn Newsletter, I would like to review the up to date research in answering some of the questions you must be asking:

- Every 10 years or so the migration is spectacular, 2019 was the latest (2009, 2003 and 1996 the previous). Why is this?
- Up to a few years ago the migration has been shrouded in mystery. Where do they start from in the Spring? Where do they go in the Autumn? Where do they spend the Winter?
- How to go about finding the answers to these questions?

The answers to the questions and how the researchers discovered them are as incredible as the butterfly they are studying!

Footnote from Morocco - Jane Smith writes:

For the last two years, we have spent Christmas in Morocco, staying at an eco-lodge in the foothills of the Anti-Atlas Mountains near Agadir on the southern Atlantic coast. We were taken on trips to see the wildlife each day. One of the more interesting visits was to the Anti-Atlas where we visited a tiny village called Laatik with an ancient fortified grain store. In 2018, this was surrounded by flowering shrubs and plants which were covered with Painted Ladies everywhere, nectaring and flying around in the warm sunshine, all of them freshly hatched. The same visit in 2019 was a sad disappointment: there were few flowering plants around, and very few Painted Ladies around, all battered and old. The next generation had not yet hatched. The abundance of Painted Ladies in 2018 Morocco was clearly the beginnings of the European invasion in the spring and summer of 2019, and I count myself lucky to have been there to see it.

A Long-tailed Blue Summer

Neil Matthews writes about the visit of a Long-tailed Blue to his garden last summer

Our house is situated in the parish of Fordington on the south side of Dorchester. It was built in 1895 and has a small rear garden. The house faces due south and the ground level at the front is about 4ft above the level of the pavement with a very small garden sitting behind a Victorian retaining wall. It has been our family home since 1997. To the east of the front path there are spring bulbs underneath an untidy tangle of everlasting sweet peas and rock rose.

My son Ashley came home for his birthday, with his partner Kerry, in August. Our adventure starts on Tuesday 13 August 2019, when they were going out for the afternoon. As he walked down the path, Ashley noticed a blue butterfly with eye-spotted hind-wings on the everlasting sweet pea plants, which flew off before he could photograph it! He mentioned the sighting to me a few days later, after a chance encounter with a butterfly expert at Alners Gorse



Long-tailed Blue at Alners Gorse
Photo: Mark Pike

(Mark Pike), who told him that there were recent sightings of Long-tailed Blues in Dorset. This prompted Ashley to check out the internet, and as a result, he reported the sighting to Dorset Butterflies, leading to correspondence with Bill Shreeves (copying me in). I did not pick up the e-mail until the 20 August, and did not think there would be any tangible evidence of the visitor at that stage. However I went out into the gloom that evening and found two small white discs on two separate flower heads of everlasting sweet peas. I was not sure of the identification and so sent the photos to Bill. One was on the sepal of a flower bud yet to open completely, the other

on the upper petal of a fully opened flower. With a hand lens the shape of the eggs could be seen – a white circular disc with a central depression. Bill came back to me, having had confirmation of the identification from Neil Hulme.

By 23 August I had identified five eggs on separate flowers. I noted that some of the flowers were already beginning to wither with the green seedpods emerging. By 25 August all eggs appeared to have hatched. I found four – three on the calyx, one on a stem – again on separate flowers. By this time the petals were brown and withered, but the stems and calyx were still green and firm. On close examination with a hand lens the eggs all appeared empty and there was no sign of any larvae.

Nothing much else occurred until 31 August. Looking around the old flower heads and particularly the pea-pods, I noticed a very small caterpillar on one pod. There was also a mark which appeared to be a small shallow pit in the same side of the pod. I tied some red string around the stalk to aid in finding it again. I looked more

closely at other pods in the vicinity. A couple of pods had some small holes with a hint of silk covering them. No other evidence was seen.

On the following day (1 Sept) at 1pm the caterpillar was still on the same pod, but its behaviour had changed. It appeared to be boring into the pod head-first. In fact, the head was inside the pod whilst the abdomen was still outside. There was a small accumulation of bright green frass close by. By 4pm the caterpillar was almost wholly immersed in the pod with just the end of the abdomen showing. An hour later, the caterpillar was all the way inside and by holding the pod towards the light, the caterpillar could be seen in silhouette.

In the early evening of 2 September I checked the plants again. The caterpillar was still easy to see silhouetted inside its



Caterpillar about to burrow into pod.
Photo: Neil Matthews

pod. On close examination, another hole had appeared in the other side-wall of the peapod, opposite the first. I assume this was actively made by the caterpillar, perhaps to aid its air supply. Whilst looking around the other pods in the vicinity I looked at another pod on the same stalk. It also had two opposing holes. However, I was unable to see any caterpillar inside. I named the first pod 'North' and the second 'South'. There were originally two eggs on the flowers on this stalk – the remains could still be seen. It appeared both may have hatched successfully.

On 3 September I looked carefully at the two pods which both seemed to have a number of small holes similarly spread. With the aid of a hand lens, I was sure I could see the caterpillar at the base of a hole in North, but couldn't see any direct evidence in South although in every way it looked so similar to North. The remains of the two eggs were still visible. Between 4 and 8 September, the caterpillar in North seemed to have moved nearer to the pointed end of the pod but was less easy to see in silhouette.

There was not much change in South. What was becoming obvious was that these two pods were not swelling like the ones on neighbouring pods. Looking at pods in silhouette both North & South had small peas in situ. However, they were very small in comparison to the peas inside other pods of similar age. I noted that most pods had both large (healthy?) and small peas (unfertilised/non-viable?) inside. However, the two pods under surveillance had no large peas and were not swelling, and both had small holes as already noted. Depressingly, the two pods were beginning to turn reddish brown and were looking more woody.

No further activity was noted. The weather was also turning wetter and cooler with a lot of rain. I resolved to leave the pods in place and let nature take its course. The weather became less clement and it became difficult for further observations. However, when I did look, all seed pods were woody – some twisting open; the petals had fallen away and the stems and leaves had also dried out. There was no sign of any evidence of any caterpillars or pupae. So ends the adventure!

Weymouth Relief Road

Phil Sterling gives us an update on the wildlife of the Weymouth Relief Road

With the road verges of the relief road now approaching 10 years since the start of construction in 2009, it is time to reflect how their wildlife is faring. On the face of it all is well, and for those who travel past the Ridgeway slopes to and from work, or who spend time walking across them, the wildflower show every year from spring to late summer remains spectacular. In 2010 and 2011, I and others from Dorset County Council sowed seed of just 26 species onto largely bare chalk and limestone. We then stood back to allow 'nature' to take over and we are now watching the slow process of natural succession. In decades to come we might actually achieve recognisable National Vegetation Classification communities, but in the meantime the slopes offer a joyful abundance of calcareous wildflowers and invertebrates throughout the growing season.



Guided walk in 2017. Photographer unknown.

Bryan Edwards of the Dorset Environmental Records Centre resurveyed the plants on the slopes in May this year, having done his first survey in June/July 2013. He found 141 species compared with 133 in 2013. The small difference in totals hides considerable changes, with 31 species added and 22 not refund. All the species sown in the seed mix have survived, with Horseshoe Vetch, Kidney Vetch and Oxeye Daisy continuing to be the most abundant. Others such as Cowslip, Marjoram, Common Knapweed, Greater Knapweed and Rough Hawkbit are now well established and

producing seedlings of their own. Bee and Pyramidal Orchids are astonishingly abundant, in thousands, on the cuttings just north of the laybys part way up the relief road from Littlemoor. Southern Marsh Orchid has established, with good numbers of spikes on the dry, eastern slope at Ridgeway. In a very few places the vegetation resembles a more semi-natural chalk grassland, with Sheep's Fescue beginning to form an open sward with large patches of Horseshoe Vetch, along with indicators such as Wild Thyme, Yellow-wort, Dwarf Thistle, Mouse-ear Hawkweed, and the moss *Weissia brachycarpa* var. *obliqua*.

Butterfly populations also continue to thrive. A fully-fledged UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme transect walk has now been established, incorporating the route that has been walked by Butterfly Conservation volunteers since 2012. 30 species have now been recorded, over half the UK list, with the most recent to colonise being Chalkhill Blue, seen egg-

laying at Ridgeway in 2018, and flying there again in 2019. It has taken several years for the population of Small Blue to expand since its colonisation in 2012, despite the abundance of its foodplant, Kidney Vetch, but in the past two summers it has been seen there in vast numbers. Adonis Blue is also doing well, and it is good to see there are at least small numbers of Wall and Small Heath in most years. These last two species are in rapid decline nationally. Moths are much less-well studied, but I am pleased that the day-flying Narrow-bordered 5-spot Burnet and 6-belted Clearwing are now thriving. I feel proud of what I helped to establish, but also relieved my confidence was well founded that the Dorset AONB would not end up with a big white scar!

Editor's note: At the time of creating this wonderful habitat, Phil worked for Dorset County Council. He is now working for Butterfly Conservation as their Building Sites for Butterflies Programme Manager, doing similar work across the country.

Tony Copper

Tony Copper retired in 1990. He joined Dorset Branch of Butterfly Conservation and the Woodland Trust, who appointed him as Warden of Duncliffe Hill and Fifehead Wood. He also joined BTCV in order to learn conservation skills.

He made great contributions to conservation work in Dorset, notably at Fifehead Wood, where he organised coppicing of Aspens for the very local moth, the Light Orange Underwing. Nigel Spring remembers Tony from the early days of conservation workparties on Lydlinch Common in the late 1980s/early 1990s. He was part of the regular group who used to open up the thorn and ash scrub on both sides of the A3030. This had been agreed through negotiations between English Nature and the then owner Colonel John Yeatman, pre-dating the large-scale clearance of scrub carried out at the beginning of this century. In those days there were at least 10 singing male Nightingales on the Common and the colony of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries was holding its own.

After Tony's illness prevented him from being active, he was able to maintain his interest in the countryside through the Countrymen's Club, part of Future Roots near Sherborne. This must have been a lifesaver for Tony and his family in his latter years.

Tony's funeral was on a brilliantly sunny day in January. A Peacock fluttered around the church during the service, a fitting farewell to Tony.



Tony Copper
Photo: Jessie Copper

Large Tortoiseshell on Portland

Brian Arnold writes about his excursions to Portland to see and photograph Large Tortoisehells

Febbruary 27 2019 was a special day. Being unseasonably warm and sunny, my wife Lerida and I were sitting on the beach near the ferry on the Studland peninsula celebrating the fantastic weather with a strawberry and champagne breakfast.

Meanwhile on Portland at Tout Quarry there was great excitement as a number of Large Tortoiseshells were being seen! A day or so later I found out about them on social media. The following days were either wet or cold, or we were busy elsewhere, so it was not until 11 March that we were able to drive from Swanage to Portland to take a look.

By then I was doubtful that we would see one but what the heck, it seemed worth a try. As we walked into Tout Quarry there were a few butterfly enthusiasts looking, and guess what? - one had been seen. A few minutes later one appeared at the bottom of the slope

beneath me and I could see its upper side clearly. It flew off almost immediately and for the next few hours appeared flying along, and occasionally settling well beyond the reach of my camera. Alas, no photos that day.

I went again on 21 March, but had no luck. I did not want to give up so on 24th March with Lerida reluctantly agreeing to yet another 62 mile round trip we went for a look. The weather was not perfect, mostly cloudy and surprisingly cold, but in the gullies of Tout Quarry there were warm sheltered areas. At least 20 others were there looking but nobody had seen one. After three hours we gave up and decided to go for a walk through to King Barrow Quarries. As we walked along I suddenly froze - there on the path ahead was a Large Tortoiseshell. In panic I realised that my "butterfly" camera was by now tucked away in the rucksack, but I still had my



Large Tortoiseshell in King Barrow Quarries 2019. Photo: Brian Arnold

compact camera slung around my neck. Trembling slightly I took a quick photo from about six feet away. The butterfly immediately flew and we chased it; it settled briefly then flew back over me, not to be seen again. I immediately had doubts - was that really a Large Tortoiseshell? I looked at the photo, which to my relief was OK and in focus, and yes it was! The specimen was tatty, faded and had a big chunk out of the left fore wing. But I was delighted - I had seen and photographed one.

A year then passed - it was now 2 March 2020. A friend who lives on Portland called me and I saw on Twitter that two Large Tortoiseshells had been seen in Church Ope Cove on Portland. The next day was sunny, and the cove is sheltered on the south

east, so with the wind from the north west off I went for a look. Lerida remained at home this time. As I arrived and walked down the long steep steps to Church Ope Cove I could see four people there with cameras all pointed down at the ground. My excitement built - will I get there in time, will it have flown away before I can get down the steps? As I arrived they said it had flown off, but after a few minutes it returned and I got a couple of photos. Over the next four hours two Large Tortoiseshells appeared many times, sometimes chasing each other up and down the stony beach, and settling many times on the stones, and on the sides of beach huts. Several other enthusiasts appeared during the day and all saw them and got photos. What a day!!

The big question of course is where are they coming from? They disappeared from Britain about 60 years ago. The butterfly hibernates, has only one brood per year, so the ones I saw in 2019 and 2020 probably overwintered having emerged the previous year. One was seen on Portland on 1 July 2018, and it is widely thought that it was a

release, and that others seen that year may also have been released. It seems probable that the five or so seen in 2019 emerged from matings in 2018, and then the two seen in March 2020 are the succeeding generation. According to others there are about three elms on Portland, but nobody has been able to establish if the butterflies emerged from them. We simply don't know, but wherever they have come from it was great to see and photograph them. Maybe they will establish a small fragile colony on Portland, but we can only wait and see.

I have been fortunate to see several oddities here in the UK. In July 2014 there were five Continental Swallowtails

(subspecies *Gorganus*) at St Aldhelm's Head near Worth Matravers - these were thought to have probably come across from Europe. Then in August 2014, two friends and I found the European Map butterfly at Ulwell, Swanage - thought to be the result of a release. In October 2015 I was lucky to see a Long-tailed Blue that had just emerged at Southwick Basin in Sussex. I drove a seven hour round trip to look for one, and despite just seeing it for a few minutes did get some great photos.

So what next - my dream is to see a Camberwell Beauty. They are seen very occasionally, but will I be lucky? Only time will tell.



Large Tortoiseshell in Church Ope Cove 2020. Photo: Brian Arnold

Butterfly Summer

John and Sue East moved to Hinton St Mary in July 2018, and here they describe their first summer in their garden

We moved to the village in July 2018 and the number of butterfly species we recorded in our modest patch for the remainder of that summer was a disappointing nine, so we started to plan on how to improve this.

We had already begun work on a wildflower area in one part of the garden and planned to extend this using wild flower seeds including some obtained from the Dorset Wildlife Trust as part of their “Get Dorset Buzzing” campaign. A lot of time was spent choosing what plants to put in the garden that would attract butterflies and wildlife, which was for Sue the enjoyable and relatively easy part leaving us with just the hard work of preparing the ground and planting.

Spring 2019 arrived and in April we were rewarded with good numbers of the first early

butterflies – Brimstones and Small Whites followed shortly by Orange Tips which were attracted to the Cuckooflower (Lady’s Smock) that we had added to one corner of the garden.

Other species soon followed as the weather improved – Holly Blue, Red Admiral, Large White, Green-veined White, Common Blue and Peacock. There was then a bit of a lull before we got to the real summer in July and August with continuing good numbers of some of the species previously seen and also new ones including Marbled White, Small Copper, Small Heath, Small Skipper, Speckled Wood, Comma, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Ringlet, Small Tortoiseshell and Painted Lady. In addition to the above and a real bonus for us were two “standout species” – the first was in late July when we saw Silver-washed Fritillary on two occasions on Honeysuckle and

the second was Clouded Yellow which we saw in late August. Dorset is fortunate to be home to around 45 of the 59 species of butterflies that can be found in the UK and we had seen 22 of them in our own garden - a good tally bearing in mind the very different habitat and breeding requirements of the various species.

Using a moth trap on a couple of occasions in July, we were amazed with the number and variety of moths caught (all later released unharmed). These included Poplar Hawkmoth, Privet Hawkmoth, Elephant Hawkmoth, Muslin, Buff Tip, Buff Ermine, Riband Wave, Small Chocolate, Rosy Footman, Burnished Brass, Small Magpie, Blood Vein, Common Footman, Clouded Border, Treble Brown Spot, Lackey and many others, some of which have still to be identified from the photos we took. Three day-flying moth species: Humming-bird Hawk-moth, Garden Tiger and Silver Y were also regular visitors, together with various pollinating insects, bees and hoverflies. Bee-flies were regularly seen in



Elephant Hawk-moths.
Photo: Mark Pike.

the earlier part of summer, followed by several species of dragonfly. The new wildflower area was a particular attraction to all insects throughout the summer and did so much to enhance the garden for wildlife.

It really was a glorious butterfly summer for us. What could be better than spending an afternoon relaxing in the garden on a warm sunny day, with a cup of tea and slice of cake in hand? All whilst listening to the sound of buzzing insects and watching the butterflies as they move from flower to flower in search of nectar or soaring high into the air to warn off another butterfly that has dared to venture into their territory. We have witnessed many remarkable “aerial dogfights” between butterflies defending “their territory” as they recreated their version of the Battle of Britain.

John Tubb

Bill Shreeves writes about John Tubb, who played a leading role in Dorset Branch for many years.

Sadly, after reducing his activities for many years, Alzheimers took away the life of John Tubb earlier this year. He had played a leading part in the Dorset Branch of Butterfly Conservation. His major objective was always to spread interest and awareness of butterflies to as many people as possible. John did this with his pioneering 8mm Films. Indeed I first met him on Zigzag Hill with his camera trained on a large clump of Knapweed surrounded by Chalkhill Blues. His habit was to use the summer months to build up his film and the winter to tour the village halls in the remotest parts of Dorset, grappling with the problems of different sized plug points in the process.

If anything could kindle an interest in butterflies it was John's films. I shall never forget a section of a film which closed in on a Purple Emperor as it probed with its yellow proboscis for minerals amongst leaves at

the edge of a ride. John always recalled a very slight moment of panic at one hall. When looking around after assembling his equipment he was amazed to see all the experts from the nearby Institute of Terrestrial Ecology sitting in the front row!

In the very early days John was quick to grasp that the branch could play a part in scientific monitoring of butterflies. At first he took on the idea suggested by Butterfly Conservation of doing walks and measuring the progress of species by awarding grades of one to five. However as news spread of the new 'Pollard' walks (transect walks) which counted actual numbers of butterflies within well defined rules and weather restraints, he was very quick to create a walk on Fontmell Down at the request of the Dorset Wildlife Trust. The route of this walk has had to be altered but is substantially the same today as the one created by John.

There followed a blossoming of other Butterfly Transect Walks, which differed from the earlier Dorset walks at Studland, Ballard Down and Radipole, by having teams of amateur walkers rather than a single professional. Other walks created by John were at Hod Hill, Cashmoor, Piddles Wood, Stubhampton Bottom and also at Hambledon Hill, which had to be abandoned when the managers kept setting up fences across the route without providing stiles! John would have been delighted to know that a new walk has now been set up.

For several years John worked single-handed on a project to collect the results of all chalk downland walks across Southern England and to compare them from year to year. In the end this proved too much but he had done a lot to put the coordinators of these walks in touch with each other.

John's other major contribution was in management of butterfly sites. As well as creating butterfly walks and doing them he was always organising and

taking part in work parties controlling scrub and rank grasses. He was especially involved on Cashmoor in preserving the ancient chalk downland from being buried under scrub. For several years he played a role in a small but influential committee on the management of chalk downland for butterflies inspired by Jeremy Thomas. His knowledge was not restricted to British butterflies but extended to birds, plants and other insects. Most years, he and his wife Valerie took their motor caravan around France and added a useful dimension of knowledge about continental species.

Dorset Branch of Butterfly Conservation will always remember John for his contributions to butterflies. Walkers especially may reflect on his achievements as they record butterflies on the routes which he devised. Perhaps in time some of the continental species which he enjoyed in France may even spread on to the Dorset walks which he created.

Photo on back cover: Speckled Wood by Lyn Lambert

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